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LETTER DATED 13 JUNE 1997 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and of French-speaking Community Affairs of the Republic of the Congo in response to the events under way in Brazzaville.

The purpose of this press release is to shed light on the origins of the armed conflict between the Congolese regular army, which maintains its allegiance to the Head of State, President Pascal Lissouba, and the militia of former President Denis Sassou-N'Guesso.

The Government of the Republic of the Congo would be grateful to the Security Council for any initiatives it may take, inter alia, by firmly supporting the mediation efforts under the leadership of the President of Gabon, His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, with a view to the speedy restoration of peace and the protection of democracy in the Congo.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Daniel ABIBI
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

[Original: English and French]

Press release issued in New York on 10 June 1997 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and of French-speaking Community Affairs of the Republic of the Congo on the events taking place in Brazzaville

In May 1997, the former Head of State, Mr. Denis Sassou-N'Guesso, decided to go to Owando, a town situated about 500 kilometres north of Brazzaville, on an election campaign, although the election campaign had not officially started.

As if he had forgotten that it was at Owando that he had had Captain Pierre Anga, a native of that town, assassinated, Mr. Sassou demanded to enter the town triumphantly in a "tipoye", a palanquin used by traditional rulers.

When the local population refused to accede to the request to do such an honour to the person who had ordered the execution of a native of Owando, Major Aboya, a member of Mr. Sassou's militia, fired his gun, killing in cold blood one of the law enforcement officers who was trying to restore calm. The assassination had occurred a day before Sassou was to arrive. It angered the people and triggered off a series of bloody incidents that resulted in the death of 12 innocent farmers.

Hardly had normalcy been restored in that part of the country than members of Mr. Sassou's militia deliberately opened fire on the body guards of Mr. Jacques Joachim Yhombi Opango, a former Prime Minister, on their way to Brazzaville from Owando, a route that inevitably passes through Oyo, Mr. Sassou's home town and headquarters of his militia. The body guards had earlier been disarmed by Sassou's militia before they entered the town.

Strangely enough, all this is happening despite the agreement reached between the main political leaders on 31 May 1997, at the initiative of the Head of State and in implementation of the peace accord and under the auspices of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Mr. Federico Mayor. In that agreement, the parties had undertaken to ensure the disarming of the militias and the holding of a peaceful presidential election in July. Mr. Sassou was a signatory to the agreement.

It is therefore hard to imagine that Mr. Sassou, a former Head of State, would refuse to hand over the perpetrators of the murders, sheltered and protected in his residence, to the police, but should rather order his militia to respond to the court order with violence.

Since then, Brazzaville has become the theatre of bloody clashes between government forces and former President Sassou's militiamen, supported by mercenaries.

It should be recalled that since August 1992, when he was defeated in the first democratic presidential election by universal suffrage, Mr. Sassou has been seeking to destabilize the country and possibly derail the democratic process.

During the two years that Sassou was away from the country following the bloody 1993-1994 conflict, all the democratic forces and political parties of the Congo had striven ceaselessly to heal the wounds of the nation and to reinforce peace and democracy in the country.

The Congo has been making slow but steady recovery of its credit worthiness with the international financial institutions and its credibility with its other partners.

In spite of the steps taken by the Government to ensure his safe return to the country, Mr. Sassou has constantly been organizing a revolt aimed at destabilizing the democratically elected institutions, as evidenced by his turning a simple police operation intended to carry out a court order into an armed insurrection.

Knowing very well that he stands no chance of returning to power through democratic means, the former dictator has just fomented a plot that involves taking advantage of the crisis in the former Zaire to smuggle in large quantities of weapons and bring a large number of militiamen to Brazzaville; mobilizing the people against French interests; provoking the Angolan troops based in Cabinda and seizing information centres and telecommunication facilities.

The coup d'état was designed to be completed within a short period of time. In that he failed. The former dictator considered, therefore, that he had no other way of coming back to power than through armed insurrection. Mr. Sassou has thus revealed his true colours. He does not care in the least about the suffering of the Congolese people and the foreigners among them, provided he achieves his objective. Sassou remains the same person, unrepentant, who assassinated former President Marien N'Gouabi, Cardinal Émile Biayenda, former President Massamba Debat and his colleague Pierre Anga. His tenure as President was marked by countless arbitrary arrests and summary executions. He became an accomplice of the terrorists who planted the bomb that brought down the UTA flight over the Ténéré desert. He was also the instigator of the deadly clashes of 1993-1994 in Brazzaville.

The Government of the Congo is making every effort to restore law and order and peace, preserve democracy and honour its international commitments.

The Government of the Congo calls upon the world community to support it in its endeavour to preserve its democratic institutions.